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BLUE-FOX FARMING BECOMING IMPORTANT INDUSTRY IN ALASKA

Raising blue foxes for their pelts is becoming an important enterprise on the islands along the southern coast of Alaska, according to a recent bulletin of the Biological Survey, United States Department of Agriculture, entitled "Blue-Fox Farming in Alaska." So rapidly has the industry grown that practically all suitable islands controlled by the department have already been leased for this purpose. Blue-fox farming is practiced on outlying islands of little or no value for agriculture. The foxes are allowed to roam over an entire island, where they choose their mates and make dens. The animals are, in most instances, fed at regular intervals by the ranchers.

Attempts to raise blue foxes in pens in Alaska have met with some success. It is claimed by a number of ranchers and raw-fur buyers, however, that the pelts of blue foxes thus raised lack the quality and finish of those produced under wild conditions.

A long, cold winter with a fair amount of rainfall, particularly in spring, is conducive to the production of good pelts, according to the bulletin. An island chosen for a fox ranch should have a harbor for a boat to permit communication with the mainland or other islands. Since fish is the chief article of food in the diet of the blue fox, proximity to a cannery is of decided advantage, as the waste material makes excellent feed

for the foxes. The presence of fresh-water springs, streams, or ponds on the island ranch is also important.

Selective breeding of the animals is recommended by the authors of the bulletin as a means of improving the market value of the pelts.

A short description is given concerning the development of white-fox farming in northern Alaska. That the white fox will play an important part in fox farming is indicated by the fact that of 92 permits issued in 1925 by the department for the capture of Alaskan fur bearers for propagation, 33 were for taking white foxes.

The bulletin, designated as Department Bulletin No. 1350, contains much valuable information relating to blue-fox farming, including discussions on the selection of a ranch site, breeding, feeding, transportation, characteristics of a good pelt, sanitation and treatment of diseases, and reasons for failures. Copies may be obtained free, while the supply lasts, from the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.
